

Alright. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you are here with us. And we are way deep into a series called --

Follow the Cloud.

There you go. And what we've been doing is we've been looking at the story of the Exodus, the story of the Israelites, a people who were enslaved for hundreds of years, a lost, lonely and broken people and God comes to them not because they were good but because He was good. And He sets them free, but He doesn't want to just set them free, He wants to teach them how to live free. So He takes them on this journey, from Egypt to the Promised Land, inviting them to follow Him one next step at a time. He wants to help them discover who they are, who He is and what they were created to do.

The only problem is that every turn, they didn't believe that they were who God says they were, that He was who he said He was, and that they were created to do what they were created to do. And they always wanted to go back to Egypt, back to the past, back to what was comfortable and convenient. It's like they would follow God, they would wander off in the things of the world, their life would fall apart, they'd panic, they'd cry out to God in His goodness and His grace, He would rescue them and the cycle continued over and over again. And the reason this story resonates so much with us is because it's our story. We are a lost, lonely and broken people with no ability to set ourselves free. And God comes to us not because we are good, but because He is good. And He sets you free but He wants to teach you how to live free, so He invites you on a journey to follow Him one next step at a time to discover who you are, who He is and what you were created to do.

The only problem like the Israelites, at every turn we don't believe it. And we want to go back to Egypt, go back to what was comfortable and convenient, back to the past, back to what we knew, back to a life of bondage. And we follow God and then we wander off in the things of the world, our life falls apart and we panic, oh God, help me. And then He comes and He rescues us and we follow Him for a little while and then we go back and, oh God, help me, and the cycle continues over and over and over. Yes? And yet in His goodness and His grace, He never gives up on us. You see, God's leading you to a Promised Land and the Promised Land is not a place, it's a revelation of who you are, who He is and what you are created to do. We talked about this last week, that this is really the gospel. It's the three circles. It's something that helps us grasp and understand the fullness of what Jesus did for us. This is where God is leading you to receive His grace, experience His presence and release His kingdom. When you know who you are, you'll know who God is and you'll know what you were created to do.

When your identity is restored, your relationship with God is reconciled and you'll have a redeemed purpose. When you know you're a beloved son, you'll run to the Father and you'll spend your life building His kingdom. When you know you're forgiven, you'll never be afraid of God and you'll live free. But the opposite is also true. If I resist His grace, I'll avoid His

presence and I'll spend my life building my own kingdom. When I don't know who I am, I don't know who He is and I don't know what I am created to do. If I believe I'm an orphan, I'll always be afraid of God and I'll spend my life trying to validate myself. If I don't think I am forgiven and I'm full of shame and guilt, I will be terrified of God and I will spend my life earning and performing to try to make up for my failures. And the problem for so many of us is that we start in circle three. We try harder, behave better, do more, look a certain way to earn a relationship with God, to pay for our past, so eventually we can become significant and successful, not realizing that in Jesus, you are already as significant as you will ever be.

We are drawn by grace, not driven by expectations. And what I want you to understand is this thing is like a loaded spring. It starts in circle one and as you get it, it just unleashes little by little momentum and it starts moving you deeper into the Father's heart, into the life of freedom that God has for you. And it all starts in circle one. It all starts in identity, receiving His grace. Why? Because identity determines what you do. Who you are determines what you do. Come on, real quick with me. Fish --

Swim.

Birds --

Fly.

Cows --

Moo.

Dogs --

Bark.

Let's see if you got this. Cats --

Annoy.

There you go. Sinners sin. Righteous people live righteously. Beloved sons and daughters live free in their Father's kingdom.

So it all starts in circle one. The problem is we often have the world's definition of grace. And the world's definition of grace is it's no big deal, it doesn't really matter, everybody else is doing it too, just forget about it, pretend like it never happened. I tried my best. This is just who I am. You be you and I'll be me. But grace is so much more than that. Grace forgives our sins, changes our identity and empowers us to live differently. And so I got a lot that I want to

say to you today. So can you just kind of prepare yourself, lean in and let me walk you through this because when you start in circle one and you start learning how to receive God's grace, it changes everything. It all starts with forgiving our sins. When God shows up for the Israelites, these were slaves.

These were people in debt. These were people in bondage. And they had no way to set themselves free, no way to take care of their past. And God comes to them not because they were good, but because He was good. Look at this, "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were actually the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery." He says, let's make this real clear. I didn't come because you were awesome. I came because I'm awesome. And I came to set you free out of slavery and redeem you and bring you into a life of freedom. And the same is true when Jesus comes to you. Jesus doesn't come to you because you're good, he comes to you because he is good. And he comes and he moves in our lives, we're the least deserving, least expecting people, the fewest of all.

We haven't done anything right. We didn't earn it or we didn't deserve it, but He comes to us anyways. And when Jesus hung on the cross and said, Father forgive them, they know not what they do. It is finished. In that moment, all your sin, all your shame, all the separation that you have with God was finished, taken care of once for all time. All your sins past, present and future have already been forgiven in Jesus. The things you used to do, the things you're struggling with now and the mistakes you'll make in the future, they've already been forgiven in Jesus. You say, how is it possible that a sin I haven't even committed has already been forgiven? Well, it was two thousand years ago when Jesus said, it is finished. All your sins were in the future then. And that's how great Jesus is. Come on, look at these verses, "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

The sins you can't seem to forget are the ones God says He can't seem to remember. That thing from 20 years ago, that thing you did last night, that thing that holds on to the shame, the guilt, the condemnation in your life. You have that one? That's the one God says, in Jesus, He can't even remember it because it's already been paid in full. So why do you insist on holding on to something God says He's already forgiven? Or how about this, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." Come on, how far is the east from the west? It's infinite. That's how far He has removed your sins from you. Or how about this? "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." You know what condemnation means? It means to be accused, found guilty and deserving of punishment. Do you know Jesus was condemned on the cross? He was accused, found guilty and was punished for your sins.

And because he was condemned on the cross, you now can't be condemned by God because He can't punish the same sins twice. They've already been taken care of by Jesus, not because

you earned it or deserved it, but this is what grace does. And this is how it changes our lives. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God wants us to remember that in Him we are already forgiven and set free, so we don't have to live with things in the dark, we can bring it right to Him, knowing that in Him we have already been forgiven in Jesus' name. Are you with me on this? Grace forgives our sins, not just like the little baby ones, like all of them. And not just the really big ones that we're ashamed of, but the little baby ones too. All of them. Say it with me.

All of them. That's how many. I mean do you remember the Passover? It's the final plague before God sets the Israelites free. And He tells them to take a spotless lamb, to kill it, to take its blood and put it on the doorposts of their house and then to stay inside that house. He said, because on that night he was going to pass over all of Egypt and all the firstborn would be killed. But all who were under the blood would be safe. And what was that a picture of? The lamb is a picture of Jesus, the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. The doorposts are a picture of the cross and the blood of God that if we rest under, we are safe. And here's what I want you to see, when He tells them, He says, "The blood will be a sign for you." The blood is not a sign for God. He already knows what's happened. He already knows what He has done. The blood is a sign for us, "on your house is where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you."

In other words, when God looks down and He sees us under Jesus, He sees the perfection of Jesus. And when we look up and we see the blood, it's a sign for us to remind us that we have already been fully forgiven and completely free in Jesus' name.

This is huge. The sign was not for God, it was for them. It's like wearing a ring, it's a sign to remind you you're married. It's like, why do you have calendar appointments? To remind you, you have somewhere important to go. Why do you write little sticky notes with things? To remind you of something that's important to you. The blood is a reminder that in Jesus you are fully forgiven and completely free. So how does he forgive your sins? When you simply receive his grace. Forgiveness is a choice God has already made, receiving His grace is a choice you now get to make.

Are you with me on that? So it all starts with forgiving our sins, but it doesn't stop there. It changes our identity. When God sets the Israelites free and He brings them out of Egypt, do you know that it says that they leave with all the gold of Egypt? This is amazing to me. They've just spent 400 years as poor slaves and they get set free and God moves in the hearts of the Egyptians to give them all the gold. So they literally leave as rich sons. They spent their lives as poor slaves with nothing and they leave with rich sons. He canceled their debt, forgave their sins, but he credited their account. He blessed them in the heavenly realms with all the spiritual riches. And the same thing that He does for us. In fact, look at this, it says, "You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Catch the radicalness of this.

They had just spent hundreds of years as slaves, making bricks for Pharaoh. He sets them free and they are now sons and a kingdom of priests, a holy nation and they have all the wealth of Egypt. Does that sound radical? That is a radical identity change. And that is a prophetic picture of how radical the identity shift God does in you and me when we actually receive the grace of Jesus. Come on. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come." New creation is literally the word metamorphosis. It's like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. It is such a complete identity change. It's a new nature, a new reality that no one would ever confuse a butterfly with a caterpillar. They're two totally different things. The old has gone, the new has come. God has not only canceled your debt, He has credited your account with a new identity and a new reality.

You were slaves, you're now a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. That's radical. I would say the day the butterfly flies in the sky, that is a pretty radical change from being a caterpillar spending its whole last lifetime crawling in the dirt. Same is true with you and me. Are you with me on this? Okay. Now, this verse, you have to get this verse because it is so important to the gospel. "For just as through the disobedience of the one man, Adam, in the garden and his failure, the many were made sinners." This is an identity statement. It's who we were. "So also through the obedience of the one man, Jesus, the many will be made righteous." Identity statement. Now, here's what you got to catch. When Adam was in the garden and he sinned and he rebelled against God, in that moment he wrecked the identity of humanity.

He ruined our identity, he made us sinners. Sinner became our identity. It's who we were. We're not sinners because we sin, we sin because we're sinners. Who you are determines what you do. We're not sinners because we sin, we sin because we're sinners. Just like cats annoy, it's an identity that leads to a reality, right? That's who we were. So when you were born into this world, you were born trapped in a prison of sin. Why? Because you've come from the lineage of Adam. It's your nature, it's your identity. You're born in a prison of sin. Sinner was your identity, so sin was the life you were going to live. And so we shouldn't be surprised when we look around at the world and they're sinning and be like, why are these people sinning so much? It's because it's who they are. It's all they can do. It's their identity. It's the natural normal reality of their life. And you were trapped in this prison of sin and there was nothing you could do to get yourself out of it.

And then Jesus came. And when you put your faith in Jesus, he rescues you from being a slave to sin, moves you over here, and now puts you into this position of righteousness. You are now righteous not because you live righteously, you live righteously because you're now righteous. And just like there was nothing good you could do to get yourself out of the prison of sin, there is now nothing bad you can do to get yourself out of this position of righteousness. Why? Because your identity has been established. You're now included with Christ. You have been made righteous through him. Just like Adam made us sinners, Jesus now has made us righteous. Come on. This is why Second Corinthians tells us, "For God made him, Jesus, who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Literally, Jesus became our sin on the cross so we could become the righteousness of God. He changed your identity and it is radical.

Come on, you with me on this? Let me ask you this question. If a sinner does something righteous, does that make them righteous? You're like, I think that's a trick question. If a sinner does something righteous, does it make them righteous? No, because what we do doesn't determine who we are. Okay. So if a righteous person sins, does that make them a sinner? You're like, this is the trick question right here. No, because what you do doesn't determine who you are. Once my identity has been changed, I have now been moved into a new place. The Bible says you're a slave to righteousness. A slave can't set themselves free. So you are now -- literally, if you if you can catch the gravity of the word, in bondage to righteousness.

It's an identity that you now cannot change in your own life regardless of how you live. And we struggle with this. Some of you, I just like -- every hair on your neck just like bristled up and I'm like stressing you out. You're like, heresy. No. Read the Bible. It actually is funny. You are not a sinner saved by grace, you now are a beloved son or daughter in Jesus. And the reason we struggle to believe this is because it's a whole lot easier to believe we're a sinner. It's a whole lot easier to walk around with the spirit of Eeyore, moping and kicking the dirt and self-condemnation. I'm so bad and I just struggle all the time and I just, you know, just trying to get through this live one bad day at a time. I mean that takes no faith. My voice is sore today, so I got nothing for you. That's all I got, alright? That takes no faith. You know, it takes faith to believe you're a beloved son.

And without faith it's impossible to please God. So don't you think that God is pleased when we call ourselves beloved sons and daughters instead of worthless sinners? Don't you think it honors God to believe we now are righteous even when we're aware of our own failures? Doesn't it take more faith to believe we're defined by what Jesus has done than by what we do? Come on, humility is not putting yourself down, it's agreeing with what God has said. That's humility. That's when pride goes away. It's no longer, well no, but I know what I've done, so I'm going to define myself by my -- humility is just choosing to agree with what God has already said regardless of how I feel. Come on, you with me on this? Come on, if the Holy Spirit dwells in you, that means you now are holy.

If I'm now the temple of God, that means I must be set apart. If I've been made right with God, I must now be righteous. If He says He will be a Father to me, the only conclusion is that I must be a beloved son or daughter. Come on, this is why some of you wonder why don't we spend more time preaching about sin here. Here's why. Because why do we want to spend all our time preaching against your old nature? Faith comes by hearing. So whatever I'm hearing, my faith in that thing grows. None of us need more faith in our old identity. None of us need more faith in how bad we used to be, and the sinner, and the prison we were in and all the struggles and the brokenness and the darkness. You know what we need? We need people

calling to the new nature in our lives, calling us out of the dirt to soar in the sky and say, that's who you were, this is who you now are.

And I know you're doing all the things you want to do, but that's not who you are. It doesn't define you. Yeah, what you did last night, you're still in the prison of righteousness. And that's what starts to change us. Come on, this is why it says, "Because as he is, so we are in this world." We're included in Christ which means everything that's true of Jesus is now true of us. Because he is loved, so am I. Because he is righteous, so am I. Because he is set apart, so am I. Everything that's true of Jesus is now true of you. He's not a picture of who you can become if you strive and struggle and just train and do better and do more really hard. No, no, he's a mirror of who you now are. And the more clearly you see Jesus, the more clearly you see yourself. In fact, when Jesus was baptized and he came up out of the water, the Father spoke from heaven and said, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."

This is really important. Jesus' primary identity was beloved son. Jesus, creator of the universe, sustainer of all things, the author of life, savior of the world, and yet his primary identity was beloved son. He was totally content to live as a son in dependence upon his Father, in trust, in peace, walking in intimacy, going and moving and being in submission and surrender to his Father. Jesus didn't need from the world what he already had in God. So it didn't matter if the crowd accepted him or rejected him, because he already knew who he was, he had nothing to prove. The same is true with you.

The moment you put your faith in Jesus, you become a beloved son or daughter in whom the Father is well pleased. And you don't now need from the world what you already have in God. You don't need the approval of men because you already have the validation of the Father. You don't have to spend your life trying to get the world to say what God already has, that you are loved and He is well pleased with you. Are you with me on this? I mean you remember the story of Jeremiah? He's a little boy and God comes to him one day and calls him a prophet, an identity declaration. Check this out. God says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you. Before you were born I set you apart; and I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." "Ah, Sovereign Lord," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you and say whatever I command you."

God comes to Jeremiah, says, hey Jeremiah, I formed you, I knew you, I set you apart, you belong to me so only I get to say who you are and I have declared that you are a prophet. And Jeremiah's response is, oh no, I'm just only a child. And God says, do not say, I'm only a child. In other words, when God tells you who you are, don't tell them who you're not. When God tells you you're a prophet, don't tell Him you're a child. When God tells you you're a beloved son or daughter, don't tell Him you're a worthless sinner. When God tells you you're righteous, don't tell Him you're a failure. When God tells you you're victorious, don't tell Him you're defeated. When God tells you who you are, don't tell them who you're not. Come

on. You are not what the world says, you are not what they say, you are not even what you say, you are what He says. The world will tell you -- the world will tell you, you are what you have, so go get a bunch of stuff.

The world will tell you, you are what you do, so you better go and perform. The world will tell you, you are how you look, so you better look really good. But God comes and He says, you are who I say you are. And so can I just ask you a question? What are you trying to prove and who are you trying to prove it to? So you never graduate from the school of identity. You never mature beyond circle one. No matter how long you walk with God, He always brings you back to circle one. And He takes you deeper and deeper. Because we really struggle to really believe that we are the fullness of who He says we are. And if you think of almost all the struggles in your life, they could be boiled down to identity issues. Come on, fear of rejection? Identity issue.

People pleasing? Identity issue. Workaholic? Identity issue. Addiction? Identity issue. Most of our mental health challenges? Identity issue. Religion? Identity issue. Busyness? Identity issue. It's like no matter how you cut it, it's an identity issue. And God's bringing us back to remind us, like come on, like why do you need that title? Why do you need that promotion? Why do you need to be followed on social media and get a whole bunch of likes? Why do you need people to notice you and celebrate you? Why do you need to get that trophy or that award? Do you ever just stop and think, maybe it's all broken identity in me? Like some of us spend our whole life hiding because we don't believe we're loved. And some of us spend our whole lives putting ourselves out there because we think it's the only way we'll be loved.

Some of us spend our whole lives getting taken advantage of because we believe we're unworthy. And some of us spend our whole lives taking advantage of others because we believe our worth is found in being superior to others. It's identity. Come on, when was the last time you even stopped in your own life and thought, is God trying to show me something about who I actually am right now in this struggle? And let that circumstance or that situation drive you back to receiving His grace and be reminded that you have nothing to prove because you already are who He says you are. I mean I'll never forget when Colleen looked at me one day and said to me, she said, you realize people celebrate your dysfunction. Great date night start right there.

And I had to think about that for a second and she said, yeah, you realize like people celebrate your dysfunction. And as I thought about it, I thought my brokenness, my identity brokenness is performance. That I don't think anyone wants me for me, they want me for what I can do, so I spend my life performing. And what happens when you perform well? People celebrate you. So they actually reinforce a broken reality in your life. And I would bet the same is true for you. If you struggle with performance or people celebrate that dysfunction, that's a dysfunction that's getting celebrated. People pleasing, caretaking, religion, busyness. Start thinking about



the things, you'd be amazed. And there's nothing wrong with those things as long as they're driven from our identity, not for our identity. And that's the journey that God's trying to free us of. Come on, I have so many stories of friends who have gone to third world nations, to go and adopt a child.

And they go at great cost and great expense to rescue this child out of heartbreaking third world, terrible conditions. And they bring the child home. And the identity has changed. They have a new name, a new reality. They're brought into a new nature. They're now a part of this family. But my friends have told me how they still live like they're in the orphanage. They won't share toys with other brothers and sisters. They hide food all over the house because they're not sure when they're going to get fed again. They won't receive or give any affection. And they've told me how they've had to sit down and walk the child through and show them all the toys and say, see all these toys, they all belong to you. You can play with them whenever you want. Because in the orphanage, if they let it go, they probably never would get it back. And then they would have to walk them to the cupboard and open it up and show them all the food and say, see all this food, it belongs to our family. You can eat whenever you want. Because in the orphanage they had to stash food because they never were sure when they were going to get fed again.

And then they told me how they'd grab the son or daughter and hug them and not let them go as they tried to squirm away and said, feel this hug no matter where you go or what you do. I will never stop loving you. Because in the orphanage they were constantly rejected by everyone all the time. And they had to learn how to live according to the new reality of who they are. And the same is true with us. We've spent so long in the orphanage of this world that, yeah, yeah, we may know it up here, beloved son, but we don't believe it in here. And so the Father has to open up the cupboard of heaven and show us Jesus and say, you see all of this, it all belongs to you. And no matter where you go or what you do, I will never let you go because your identity has been changed. And so the question is, are you living that way? Do you live more like a spiritual orphan or a beloved son or daughter?

And it's great that you could walk around if you're a part of Valley Creek and quote, beloved sons and daughters. That's great. I don't really care at all if you got it here. Just look at this. Do you see God as master or as a father? Are you actually living with fear or with freedom? Do you take care of yourself or do you allow yourself to be loved? Do you feel lonely or do you feel wanted and accepted? Do you achieve and perform for your life or can you receive and rest? Do you have a poverty mindset or an abundance mindset? And are you skeptical or do you trust? I think we can all say this title right here. The question is, are you moving your life to actually live according to the new nature that God has given you? And dads, your primary job is to declare this truth over your children.

Women give life, men give identity. That's why you were given life by your mother, but you've got your father's name. Eve is the mother of all life, Adam, the father who declared identity of

the animals, and he told them who they were. And by declaring their identity, it actually set forth their destiny. So your job is to constantly tell your kids, I don't care if they're 50 years old, who they are in Jesus. And you speak it and you say it and you declare it and you believe it and you pray it and you proclaim it because why? Because the world is telling them who they are. And we don't want the world telling them who they are or who they are not, we want to take the authority that God has given us as fathers to declare it over our children. And if you don't know how to do it, use the tools we give you. Use the I Believe track that we created for kids, two minutes every day when you drop your kid off to school, make them listen to it. Be the dad. I don't want to listen to this dad, turn it off. Sorry, this is what we're listening to.

Take the Peace track, play it every night in your kids rooms before they go to bed. My kid doesn't want to listen to that, they want to listen to you fill in the blank. I ain't going to do -- I ain't even going to load you up with a weapon to shoot back. But I'm going to say, I'm the dad and this is what we're going to listen to going to bed at night. Come on. Single moms, God will give you the grace to do it as well. And you need to get your kids involved in the things around here so they get around other godly men who can partner with you in declaring it because all the issues we see in the next generation right now, they are not behavior issues, they are identity issues. They're living like spiritual orphans and so we've got to tell each other who we are in Jesus. Come on, are you with me on this? You have to discover your identity if you're ever going to step into your destiny. This is why when they get to the Promised Land, they see the giants and they say, we're grasshoppers.

Identity. What did grasshoppers do? Spend their life getting squashed. They weren't grasshoppers, they were beloved sons and daughters. And what do beloved sons and daughters do? Spend their life squishing giants. Identity changes everything. Are you with me on this? I wish I could keep going on that, but I got to grab this last thing, okay? So it forgives our sins, it changes our identity and it empowers us to live differently. When God set the Israelites free and He brings them out, He gives them the Ten Commandments. We look at the Ten Commandments as this like burdensome, religious like weighty thing. The Ten Commandments were just teaching them how to live free. They've spent their lives as slaves, they don't know how to live free. And I would just submit to you, not committing adultery, not lying, not stealing, that sounds like a life of freedom. And before God gives them the Ten Commandments, do you know the first verse of the entire Ten Commandments is this?

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." Grace. The entire Ten Commandments, the law, even starts with grace. Before God asks you to do anything, He shows you he's already done everything. Before God will ask you to do anything, He will always point you back and say, hey remember what I have already done. Now, from this reality, live free. This is why when Jesus shows up in the upper room, the first thing he does is he shows the disciples his hands and his side. He shows them he's already done everything before he asks them to do anything. Grace changes you. It empowers you to live differently. And this is the invitation I think for our church in this next season. This is the revelation we have

to get. "It, grace, teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age."

Grace teaches us to live differently. It empowers us from the inside out. It not only gives you a desire, it gives you an ability to walk in the ways of God. It allows you to walk from the spirit instead of the flesh. It allows you to live according to your new nature instead of your old nature. Come on, the law can tell you what to do but only grace can empower you to do it. The law can tell you, do not commit adultery. Only grace can empower you or teach you how to love your spouse. The law can tell you to not covet. Only grace can teach you to be grateful for your life. The law can tell you to tithe. Only grace can give you a generous spirit. And I think it's so important for you to catch, "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus."

The law was given from Moses, from a distance by God and the law demands everything from you, it offers nothing to you. The law is heavy. It's weighty. It is unflexible. It is rigid. It is exacting and it will crush you. But grace, grace demands nothing from you and offers everything to you. The law was given from a distance through Moses, but grace and truth came near through Jesus. And so what I want you to see is Jesus is not just grace, Jesus is grace and --

Truth.

Grace and --

Truth.

Grace and truth is Jesus. This is the law, this is Jesus, grace and truth. Grace leads me to truth and truth causes me to be desperate for grace. The grace of God will lead me to walk out God's truth that will set me free.

And when truth is brought into my life, I realize I can't do it on my own, so it makes me desperate for God's grace that empowers me to live differently. And here's how you know if you're living under law or if you're receiving grace. When you are confronted, convicted or challenged by some measure of truth, under the law you will be prideful, judgmental and defensive; under grace, you will be desperate and hunger with humility for the grace of God to empower you to walk out that truth. If you're not walking out truth, it means you're not receiving grace because grace leads us to truth. Are you with me on this? This is why this whole worldly version of grace in the church is so bad.

Like it's not a big deal, it's okay, everyone else is doing it, I did my best, it's just who I am, you be you, I'll be me. That is a misunderstanding of grace at best, a flat out rejection of grace at worst. I mean look at this. Just stay with me for just two more minutes. "For sin shall not be

your master because you are not under the law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! Thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you are now entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." Paul flat out says, hey, just because you're under grace doesn't mean go do whatever the heck you want. He says if you actually get grace, you realize you have a new nature, a new identity and you're now empowered to not crawl in the dirt but to soar in the sky.

And even when we mess up and we fall, we go right back to the beginning. He's already forgiven my sins and changed my identity, so I can get back up again and be empowered to live differently. It is a totally different way of thinking. In fact, what Paul says is, "But by the grace of God I am what I am." Forgiven and identity changed. "And his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was within me." This could be a life verse. He basically says, God's grace forgave him and changed him and it wasn't without effect. He worked harder than all of them. You know what that means? It means he lived differently than everyone else around him. Because if your life looks like everyone else's, then you have to ask yourself, am I actually receiving grace? Because grace of God is not without effect, it works within me and empowers me to live a completely different reality.

How do kids grow? They eat. And as they eat, they begin to grow and change before your very eyes. How do you mature in the Lord? You receive His grace and it begins to change you from the inside out. And before you know it, you start to live completely different than the world around you, and the way you used to live because the grace of God changes us from the inside out. It leads us to truth, the truth makes us desperate for more grace and it starts this amazing cycle that leads us into the life of freedom that God has for us. You with me on all of that? This is it. A lot of extra verses there.

There is a big difference between being set free and living free. There is a big difference between knowing you're forgiven and living like you're forgiven. There is a big difference between having a restored identity and living like your identity has been restored. And there is a massive difference between knowing about grace and receiving God's grace. Because you don't have to spend your life for approval, for significance, you get to start your life already approved, already significant in Jesus' name, walking out the truth that sets you free. So close your eyes with me. Come on, what does God want to say to you?

Not even necessarily in this moment, but this week. I drove us all the way to the end. I took up all of our time today, so here's just what I want to ask you to do. Would you take some time this week and just ask God if you're receiving His grace? Or where you could open up your life to receive some more of it? Would you just take some time this week to just be aware that His grace has already forgiven you, that it's already changed you and that it's empowering you to

live differently? So Holy Spirit, would you come and work in our lives and show us the grace of Jesus, what he has done and what it now means for us?

Teach us to not just be set free, but to live free in Jesus' name we pray, amen.